

Shrewsbury Public Schools

Office of Special Education
Pupil Personnel Services
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Introduction:

Shrewsbury Public Schools has a comprehensive program for students with disabilities. The school system subscribes to the philosophy that all students can learn and that the purpose of special education is to minimize the impact of disability and maximize the opportunities for children with disabilities to have access to the general curriculum. It is the responsibility of the school district to provide every student with disabilities with a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) within the least restrictive environment (LRE) from ages 3 to 22. This age range is important because it significantly increases the amount of time that the school department is responsible for educating a student with special needs that must be factored into the overall cost of special education. Other than the costs related to the professional and support staff, the most costly aspects of the special education budget include out of district placement tuition, out of district transportation, extended year services and contracted services.

Out of District Placements:

There are currently 1005 students with disabilities being serviced by the Shrewsbury Public Schools, which is 16.7% of the total school population. While the vast majority of students, 92%, are educated within Shrewsbury schools, there is a small percentage of students who need specialized programs including very small classes and a high teacher to student ratio. These students are educated either in out of district placements (6% of students with disabilities) or in collaborative programs (2% of students with disabilities). Children may attend out of district programs as day students or as residential students depending on the severity of their disabilities. The cost of these programs also varies greatly. In the 06-07 school year, private out of district placements have ranged in price from a high of \$160,518 which was for a residential program, to a low of \$26,282 for a day placement. The state of Massachusetts sets the tuition rates. Recently, a number of these programs have requested, and been granted, rate increases for a variety of reasons, including bringing their professional salaries to parity with public school teachers.

Out of district expenses are offset by the state's Circuit Breaker program. When the cost of a student's program reaches the pre-determined foundation amount, the "circuit breaker" is applied and the town is reimbursed in the succeeding fiscal year for a pre-set percentage of the remainder cost of the placement above the foundation amount.

	FY07 Budget	FY08 Budget	Difference
Out-of-district Tuition	\$3,295,307	\$3,657,053	\$361,746
Less Circuit Breaker Reim.	(\$1,350,000)	(\$1,250,000)	(\$100,000)
Net Appropriation	\$1,945,307	\$2,407,053	\$461,746

Out of District Transportation:

In addition to tuition, transportation costs are a significant budget item related to out of district placements. Shrewsbury is part of a consortium of school districts working through the Assabet Collaborative to manage transportation costs. Wherever possible, students from Shrewsbury are transported with students from surrounding towns who attend the same day programs. It is important to note, however, that few of these educational programs are located in central Massachusetts. Most are located in the metro-Boston area, which substantially increases transportation costs. The state does not provide any reimbursement for out of district transportation.

	FY07 Budget	FY08 Budget	Difference
Out-of-district Transportation	\$770,000	\$1,045,000	\$275,000

Extended Year Services:

There are two standards for determining extended year services or summer programming for students with disabilities. One is the severity of the child's disability and the other is "substantial regression." This means that if a student is likely to lose critical skills or fail to recover these skills within a reasonable amount of time compared to typical students, summer programs are required. The decision to provide extended year services is made by the Team at the student's annual IEP review. Students on the autism spectrum as well as other students with significant disabilities attend the full day summer program while students with other special needs may attend the half-day program. The program must be fully staffed with teachers, ABA technicians and aides and transportation must be provided for students.

	FY07 Budget	FY08 Budget	Difference
Extended Year Services	\$268,255	\$301,000	\$32,745

Contracted Services:

There are a variety of mandated special education services for which we must hire outside contractors. Many of these involve low incidence disabilities. Some examples of contracted services include behavior consultation, aural

rehabilitation, sign language interpretation, translation of documents into a parents' native language, blind-vision therapy, music therapy, mobility specialist and independent evaluations. There is a projected decrease in the cost of contracted services for FY '08 because a student who required extensive contracted services will turn 22 before the next fiscal year begins.

	FY07 Budget	FY08 Budget	Difference
Contracted Services	\$340,000	\$290,000	(\$50,000)

Major Cost	FY '07	FY '08	Difference
Out of District Tuition	\$1,945,307	\$2,407,053	+ \$461,746
OOD Transportation	\$770,000	\$1,045,000	+ \$275,000
Extended Year Services	\$268,255	\$301,000	+ \$32,745
Contracted Services	\$340,000	\$290,000	(- \$50,000)

Comparison of SPS to Area Towns:

Shrewsbury provides special education services to students at a cost that is lower than the towns of the Assabet Collaborative, as seen on the following charts. The source for this information in these two charts was the DOE website:

<http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/statistics/>

Town	SPED Expenses	FY05 Net School Spending (NSS)	% of Total NSS
Marlboro	\$14,484,198	\$50,588,486	28.6
Southboro	\$3,537,425	\$14,534,596	24.3
Berlin	\$549,654	\$2,428,732	22.6
Boylston	\$718,661	\$3,209,830	22.4
Maynard	\$2,675,312	\$13,034,704	20.5
Hudson	\$5,157,781	\$25,109,259	20.5
Westboro	\$6,979,597	\$34,602,209	20.2
Nashoba	\$5,744,029	\$28,790,522	20.0
Northboro	\$3,302,914	\$16,945,448	19.5
Statewide			18.9
Shrewsbury	\$8,148,481	\$44,057,313	18.5

Town	In District Per Pupil Special Ed Expenditure
Westboro	\$18,908
Nashoba	\$18,248
Berlin	\$17,331
Boylston	\$16,971
Maynard	\$16,942
Southboro	\$16,906
Marlboro	\$16,434
Northboro	\$15,888
Hudson	\$11,872
State Average	\$11,654
Shrewsbury	\$11,199

Changes to the Special Education Program for FY '08:

This is a chart of the staffing requests in the FY '08 budget. The explanation for the programmatic changes follows the chart.

School	Staff increase
SHS	1.0 learning center teacher
	1.0 life skills teacher
	.2 school nurse
	.5 school psychologist
Oak MS	2.0 learning center teachers
	2.0 classroom aides
Sherwood MS	1.0 LLP teacher
	.5 speech/lang for LLP
	1.0 classroom aide
	.5 structured reading tutor
	1.0 learning center teacher
	2.0 classroom aides
Floral St.	1.0 ELC coordinator

	.5 speech/lang for ELC
Parker Rd.	.5 speech/language
	.5 school psychologist
	7 ABA technicians
District	.2 OOD coordinator
	1.0 Adaptive PE teacher

One additional special education program, the Language Learning Program (LLP), is being proposed for in the FY '08 budget. This program is designed for students with significant language disabilities who are in grade five. By creating a class for 8-10 students with a small student-teacher ratio, speech and language services and structured reading services, the students will benefit from intense language education. This will prevent students from being placed in out of district placements, which are extremely expensive.

Currently, there are 9 students with significant language disabilities in out-of-district placements. These students are attending the Carroll School, Landmark School and Learning Prep School. This is a comparison between the out-of-district costs for students with language disabilities and the proposed Language Learning Program at Sherwood Middle School. Clearly, in addition to the social and emotional benefits to the students, having our own program in the district is more cost effective.

School	# of Students	Tuition	Transportation	Total Cost
Carroll School	4	\$124,024	\$48,420	\$172,444
Landmark School	1	\$37,331	\$21,420	\$58,551
Learning Prep School	4	\$104,464	\$9,729	\$114,193
Total Out-of-district LLP costs		\$265,819	\$79,569	\$345,188
Shrewsbury MS proposed LLP	8 to 10			\$101,871

The remainder of the changes proposed in the FY '08 budget are related to the increase in the student population at the various grade levels. It is important to note that the population of children on the autism spectrum continues to grow and impact the schools. The FY '08 budget includes a request for an increase of professional services at Parker Road Preschool where we expect an increase of seven autistic students in FY '08. We will also require an additional Elementary Learning Center coordinator and .5 speech and language pathologist at Floral St. School where the Elementary Learning Center is housed for students in grades 1-

4. An additional Life Skills teacher at SHS is needed because a significant number of students, including several who are autistic, will reach ninth grade next year.

Three additional learning center teachers at the middle schools are needed to reduce the caseloads of the special education staff. This will allow the teachers to work more closely with the regular education staff to help students be more successful on MCAS and, thereby, enhance our ability to make AYP for both schools in language arts and math for the population of students with special needs.

At the high school, the student caseloads for the learning center teachers have steadily increased from 36 in the 04-05 school year to 39 this year. Without an additional staff member, the caseloads for these teachers next year will be 45, which is an unmanageable number. High school special education teachers must interact with each of their students 5-6 academic teachers on a regular basis for students to be successful; this becomes impossible with such large caseloads. In addition, there are only 1.5 school psychologists/adjustment counselors at the high school. An additional .5 school psychologist is needed to complete the mandated assessments and counseling for the size of the high school population. Finally, two full time nurses are needed to adequately work with the combined population of 1800 students and staff anticipated for next year at SHS. This would require a .2 increase in the nursing staff.

At the district level, the number of students in out-of-district placements has grown commensurate with the growth in the population of students with special needs in SPS. Their services are coordinated by an out-of-district (OOD) coordinator. This is a unique position requiring professional time both within the school year and during the summer. The OOD coordinator is responsible for finding initial placements, writing the IEP, maintaining contact with the OOD placement throughout the year, working with the parents, and, when applicable, helping transition the student back to SPS. An additional .2 is requested for the Out of District Coordinator position.

Additional Expenses Related to Special Education:

Other important budgetary items for '08 include:

Legal fees	\$34,000
Home/hospital tutoring	\$23,000
Testing supplies	\$11,000

Legal fees: The state and federal laws governing special education are extensive and even, at times, contradictory. In addition, sometimes, despite our best efforts, the school system must go to hearings through the Bureau of Special Education Appeals and this requires full legal representation.

Home/hospital tutoring: When a student is absent for more than 14 consecutive school days due to illness, the school department must provide tutorial services for the child.

Testing supplies: These include all of the assessment tools that are used by the special education staff for initial and on-going evaluations of students with disabilities.

In the current school year, all technology needs, including assistive technology and audiological equipment, were paid through a federal grant. We plan to fund special education technology through federal grant sources in FY '08.

Conclusion:

Shrewsbury Public Schools has made a strong commitment to the education of children with disabilities. They are taught by an exceptional staff that is highly qualified in education and expertise and cares deeply about students. Most of these children are being educated in programs in town where they are able to be part of their school community. In comparison to the towns of the Assabet Collaborative and to the statewide average for special education costs, this is accomplished very efficiently. The request for additional funds for special education will allow us to continue to meet all of the state and federal mandates and provide a quality education for our students with special needs.